

Commissioner's Weekly Field Memo
Friday, December 7, 2012

Notes from Commissioner Gist

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Action Item Calendar

Today (Dec. 7): [Nonpublic-textbook reimbursement](#) form due
December 19: [Personnel-assignment updates](#) due

Notes from Commissioner Gist

1. Three schools nominated for 2013 Blue Ribbon Schools awards

Across Rhode Island, many schools are leading the way toward greatness, and it is always a pleasure to recognize the excellent work going on in our public schools through awards and recognitions. Earlier this year, I invited representatives from 12 of our exemplary schools to join me when I delivered the State of Education Address to the General Assembly. In July, when we released our 2012 School Classifications, we recognized 26 schools with our highest classification, Commended School. Over the past few weeks, we have been reviewing the criteria for the selection of Blue Ribbon Schools, the highest honor that the U.S. Department of Education Awards to schools. These schools must demonstrate either exceptionally high achievement or dramatic improvement in the school as a whole and among student groups. I am pleased to let you know that three of our schools are excellent candidates for the Blue Ribbon award, and we have submitted their names in nomination to the Department:

- Stony Lane Elementary School, North Kingstown – high achieving
- Veazie Street School, Providence – improving
- William M. Davies, Jr. Career-Technical High School – improving

Each of these schools must complete the application process by February 15, and the U.S. Department of Education will select the

2013 Blue Ribbon Schools next September. Congratulations to the educators, the students, and their families in these three schools. They represent some of the very best work taking place every day in Rhode Island schools and classrooms, and I wish them the best of luck through the application and selection process.

2. Rhode Island recognized for Green Ribbon Schools initiative

I was pleased to see this week that the U.S. Department of Education has commended RIDE as one of the state education agencies that has expanded the Green Ribbon Schools program to include “Green Strides.” As part of the Green Strides initiative, we work with our Green Ribbon Schools and with a nonprofit agency, the Apeiron Institute for Sustainable Living, to provide schools across the state with information on best practices for sustainability, environmental education, and energy-efficient school facilities. We were honored that the U.S. Department of Education awarded Green Ribbons to two Rhode Island schools this year (Classical High School and the Nathan Bishop Middle School, both in Providence), recognizing their “comprehensive approach to creating ‘green’ environments through reducing environmental impact, promoting health, and ensuring a high-quality environmental and outdoor education to prepare students with the 21st-century skills and sustainability concepts needed in the growing global economy.” We hope to have a strong slate of nominees this spring for the 2013 Green Ribbon Schools awards. For more information on the Green Ribbon Schools application process, see:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Finance/Funding/construction/schoolconstruction.aspx>

Applications are due on **January 15**.

Please feel free to call me (222-8700) or e-mail me (deborah.gist@ride.ri.gov) if you have any questions about the Green Ribbon School awards.

3. Association releases report on potential effects of “fiscal cliff” on districts

The American Association of School Administrators has released *Federal Public Education Revenues and the Sequester*, a new report that uses National Center of Education Statistics data to analyze of the share of federal education revenues within every school district in the country. The Association also released a “fiscal cliff toolkit,” which includes a map detailing—by school district, state, and Congressional district—the share of federal education dollars. The toolkit also includes a list of the revenue detail for every school district in the country. To access the report and the toolkit, see:

Report: <http://aasa.org/FiscalCliff.aspx>

Toolkit: <http://aasa.org/FiscalCliffToolkit.aspx>

4. Labor Relations Board issues decision regarding RIDE

This morning (December 7) I released this statement to the media on the Labor Relations Board decision regarding RIDE:

I have received the R.I. Labor Relations Board decision regarding an e-mail message that I sent to all staff at the R.I. Department of Education (RIDE) on February 19, 2010. My message to the RIDE staff was clearly intended to advise staff members that they should never misuse state

resources, in materials or work time, by contacting a superintendent of schools without authorization regarding an order this agency has issued to the superintendent.

In its decision, the Board quotes only the first and last sentences of my e-mail message. Here is the complete message, which provides further context omitted in the decision:

Colleagues:

It has come to my attention that some of you have been approached to take an active role in the events transpiring in Central Falls. As you all know, Central Falls High School has been identified by RIDE as one of the state's "persistently lowest-achieving schools." I have implemented a protocol for intervention in the state's "persistently lowest-achieving schools" that complies with applicable federal and state law. Now that the protocol has been implemented, the role of this agency is strictly limited. We are currently waiting to receive official correspondence from the superintendent regarding the school district's next steps. No member of the RIDE staff should be corresponding or interacting with the administration of the Central Falls School District during this process without my knowledge and express permission.

I do not expect every member of the RIDE staff to agree with every decision that is made by individual districts – or even every decision that I make on behalf of this agency. I do, however, fully expect that all RIDE staff will: (1) adhere to our own protocols and processes; and (2) do nothing to

impede the work of this Department as established by the Commissioner and/or the Board of Regents. To that end, please be assured that I will not hesitate to take action against any employee of RIDE who purposefully works to thwart RIDE policy. As members of RIDE, we each have a responsibility to represent this agency and its mission at all times.

Thanks,

Deborah

At this time, RIDE does not intend to appeal the decision of the Board, and we will comply with the order to post a copy of the decision on bulletin boards in our workplace.

From RIDE

School Safety:

5. Free removal of hazardous, toxic, and prohibited chemicals from high schools available

Our Office of Statewide Efficiencies has learning about a one-time offer for free removal of hazardous and toxic chemicals as well as any prohibited chemicals. As part of the settlement of a Resource Conservation and Recovery Act enforcement action that the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, Region 1 (EPA), brought against a waste-management company located in Providence, the free removal of outdated and unwanted chemicals from high schools within a 50-mile radius of the Providence facility of the company is being offered. The removal and proper disposal of these chemicals will reduce the risk of chemical accidents, chemical

exposure, and chemical theft. If schools in your district are interested in this assistance, they must contact Dwight Peavey, at the EPA, by **December 21**, by e-mail, at peavey.dwight@epa.gov, or by phone, at (617) 918-1829.

Data Systems:

6. Personnel-assignment data updates due December 19

As we shared last week, we are pleased to announce the launch of a process that will allow LEAs to report assignment data regarding certified educators. This new process –the Personnel Data Collection (PDC) – will replace the existing Personnel Assignment Process (PAP) and will be part of the set of data collections that are housed under the eRIDE portal. We will launch the PDC on January 17. Our Office of Educator Quality and Certification has shared this information with all human-resources directors through the human-resources listserv. Please complete your PAP updates by **December 19** to help us ensure the most accurate data transfer from PAP to PDC.

RIDE will post this field memo on Tuesday, at:

<http://www.ride.ri.gov/Commissioner/fieldmemos/default.aspx>